

Yesterday's Soldier

Yesterday's soldiers entered the 20th century as the victors of the Spanish-American War and faced new challenges in the Philippine Islands, China and other hot spots.

Today's soldiers — with a modern force structure, computerized equipment and high-tech weaponry — owe a debt of gratitude to their unknown comrades in simple blue shirts and battered campaign hats.

This representation of the 1900-era soldier includes individual equipment issued to soldiers during that period.

Sky-Blue Kersey Overcoat

The all-seasons overcoat was made of 22-ounce sky-blue kersey (twill weave) lined with dark-blue flannel. The pattern was calf length and double breasted, fastening with two rows of six coat-size brass buttons. Attached underneath the rolling collar by means of metal hooks and eyes was a removable, finger-length cape, lined with dark-blue flannel for the infantry branch color, and closing with seven brass buttons.

Weight: 7.0 pounds

Rubber Poncho

Every soldier also carried a poncho for rain protection. Authorized in 1861, the poncho was made of half-bleached cambric sheeting coated with Para rubber and measured 60 inches wide by 72 inches long, with 18 brass grommets along the edges, equally spaced. In the center of the poncho was a 13-inch-wide slit opening for the soldier's head; the slit closed by a flap fastened by a button.

Weight: 2.8 pounds

Tin Canteen

The water canteen was a pre-Civil War pattern that was modified in 1878. Equipped with a leather shoulder strap, the canteen was made of sheet tin. It was 7 inches in diameter and 3 inches thick, and the rimmed mouth piece was closed with a tin-capped cork and riveted with an iron wire stem and loop attached by a brass 3-inch chain. Soldered to the tin loop on each side was a wire loop for the leather shoulder strap. The contents stayed cool by dampening the gray Petersham (wool felt) and drab cotton-duck outer cover.

Weight: 1.2 pounds

4.2 pounds w/3 pints water

Shelter Tent

The shelter tent of 1861 was adopted from the French army and made of white cotton duck. It measured 65 inches by 61 inches, with a triangular end piece, added in 1892, of 3 feet, 7 inches. The two halves together created the "pup" tent. Each half also included a manila guy line, a two-piece, 46-inch wooden pole, and five 9-inch wooden pins. After 1899 the tent changed color from white to khaki, and cloth straps were added in 1900 to create a shelter-tent and clothing-roll combination.

Weight: 2.6 pounds

Woolen Blanket

Included in the clothing allowance was a blanket of pure long-staple wool in a twill weave. It measured 7 feet long by 5 1/2 feet wide. The color was a mixture of blue and white yarns, with a dark-blue stripe, 2 1/2 to 3 inches wide, across each end, about 6 inches from the edge. In the center the letters "U.S." were either woven or stamped in indigo dye.

Weight: 5.0 pounds

Blanket Bag and Heavy Marching Order

In 1878 the Watervliet Arsenal modified the individual equipment to include, besides a canteen and haversack for rations, a rectangular blanket bag made of drab cotton duck for the bedding and spare clothing. It was worn on the back and was supported by detachable shoulder straps of black leather with double-wire brass hooks. Within the blanket bag each soldier carried a shelter tent, poncho, overcoat, blanket, extra shoes, extra clothing and toilet articles.

Weight: 24.9 pounds (full)

Haversack Ration and Mess Equipment

The cotton-duck haversack carried the soldier's meat can and spoon of tinned iron and the steel knife and fork with cast iron handles. It also contained the loose hard bread ("hardtack") crackers, bacon in a detachable bag, and coffee, sugar and salt in separate cotton-drill drawstring bags. The haversack ration differed little from that consumed during the Civil War.

Weight: 3.0 pounds (rations)

Dark-Blue Flannel Shirt

The soldier's flannel shirt had been dark blue since 1881. It was made of 10-ounce wool flannel in a slip-on pattern with a 14 1/2-inch deep plaquet opening and a 3-inch deep rolling collar. The round cuffs and breast pockets, 7 inches deep by 6 inches wide, all fastened with black horn or rubber buttons.

Weight: 1.3 pounds

Fur Felt Campaign Hat

Authorized in 1889, the drab campaign hat had a 3-inch brim and a 5 3/4-inch crown, with ventilation holes on each side. In 1899, orders added a hat cord and metal letters and numerals for unit identification. The center-creased hat took many forms until the appearance in 1912 of the "Montana Peak" service hat, still worn by male drill sergeants.

Weight: 0.4 pounds

M-1896 Magazine Rifle

In 1892, the Army adopted a magazine rifle to replace its single-shot, black-powder arms. Called the "Krag-Jorgensen" after its Norwegian inventors, this weapon fired a high-velocity, smaller-caliber cartridge.

Caliber: .30

Capacity: 5 rounds

Overall length: 48.9 inches

Weight: 10.1 pounds

Cycle rate: 20 rds/min

Woven Cartridge Belt

The soldier carried 100 rounds of .30-caliber rifle ammunition in his double-loop cartridge belt. Adopted in 1894, to match the dark blue uniform, the color returned to a natural gray after the war with Spain.

Weight: 1.6 pounds empty

13.5 pounds with cartridges

M-1892 Knife Bayonet

Attached to the cartridge belt by means of the M-1899 double-wire hook, the blue-steel scabbard of the M-1892 knife bayonet replaced the socket bayonet with triangular blade.

Weight: 1.7 pounds

Sky-Blue Kersey Trousers

Soldiers wore trousers of 22-ounce wool kersey (twill weave) in the traditional contrasting sky blue. The post-1885 shade was darker than the Civil War color. These trousers had a separate waist band, fly front and suspender buttons of black japanned metal, with watch and side pockets in front and one right pocket and buckled cloth back strap in the rear.

Weight: 2.0 pounds

Khaki Canvas Leggings

To secure and protect their trousers, soldiers wore leggings of 15-ounce khaki cotton duck. Fastened with a braided round cord around brass hooks on the outside and a buckled leather strap beneath the instep, leggings eliminated tucking the trousers into the socks. Adopted in 1889, they remained part of the field uniform until the first combat service boot arrived in 1943.

Weight: 0.5 pounds

Black Calfskin Shoes

The soldier's shoe was made of black calfskin. It had full-leather heels and machine-stitched Goodyear welt soles. The pattern used an ankle-high quarter (upper) with a web heel strap, joined to a straight vamp (toe) with a horizontal seam.

Weight: 2.3 pounds

Haversack